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The Impact of Collaborative Output Tasks-based Instruction on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Knowledge of Active/Passive Voice

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the impact of collaborative output tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice. The main question this study tried to investigate was whether there would be any significant difference between the means of the two participant groups in a grammar posttest if the groups were taught with two different teaching methods. The participants of the study comprised 40 EFL learners. They were divided into two experimental and control groups. Each group consists of 20 participants. The control group received the traditional treatment while the experimental group was taught active/passive voice through collaborative output tasks. Two similar tests were prepared as the pretest and posttest to measure the students' active/passive voice knowledge at the beginning and end of the study. To analyze the data, a series of paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests were run. The results showed that participants in the experimental group had a better performance than the control group. Consequently, it was concluded that the utilization of collaborative output tasks in teaching active/passive voice led to a higher level of knowledge improvement.

Keywords: collaborative, output tasks, passive voice, active voice, EFL learners

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1. Introduction

Teaching English grammar has been a controversial issue over the past decades. To teach grammar, it should be noted that models of grammar differ greatly, depending on whether they are formal grammars or functional grammars. Formal grammar is concerned with the forms themselves and with how they operate within the overall system of grammar, and functional grammar deals with the functions the grammatical structures perform in the language system. Traditional grammar, which describes the structure of sentences, is perhaps the best known formal grammar (Schmitt, 2010).

Language input contains many instances of the target language and different grammatical aspects. Swain (1985) proposed the Output Hypothesis about three decades ago. She believed that output pushes learners from semantic processing prevalent in the input to the syntactic processing to encode meaning during output. She contends that compared with input, there is more mental effort involved when learners are engaged in output processing, and, therefore, output is part of the learning process rather than the outcome of it. The rationale behind using output-based tasks in language classrooms is that learners mainly process input for meaning. But when they are pushed to produce output and subsequently provided with the relevant input, their attention is most likely drawn to the forms.

Dehghan and Mohammad-Amiri (2017), quoting from Swain (1985) stressed the significant role of output in learning a second language, claiming that output is necessary and vital for learners to move from semantic to syntactic processing. Swain (2005) introduced noticing, hypothesis testing, and metalinguistic functions as three significant usages of output in second language learning/acquisition. The noticing function proposes that, upon producing output, it is possible for the learners to become cognizant of some deficiencies in their linguistic knowledge since they probably realize that they do not have the competence to produce what they want to communicate. The hypothesis testing function proposes that, upon communication with others, the learners make an effort to produce the same linguistic item in different ways and in so doing they possibly get to evaluate the comprehensibility and accuracy of their utterances. With respect to meta-linguistic function, it is commonly believed that output forces the learners to get involved with language consciously and decide what to say and what not to say. Collaboration, as a mediator, may accelerate these functions. Through collaborative learning, the learners are required to cooperate with their peers in order to reach a common goal; that is, being responsible for their own learning. Learners will be given the chance to acquire a new knowledge every time they come across new communication problems and will also be given the opportunity to discuss their solutions regarding such problems. Consequently, their existing knowledge can be consolidated as a result of collaboration with their peers.

According to Abassy Delvand and Mashhadi Heidar (2021), collaborative learning was developed on the basis of the sociocultural theory of language learning. Mashhadi Heidar and Afghari (2015) claim that Dynamic Assessment (DA), a process-oriented/collaborative approach to guiding assessments, is grounded in the Vygotskyan codes of intervention and backing in the zone of proximal development. DA provides learners with help whenever needed all through the enactment of the two-way-negotiation assessment task. As stated by Mansouri and Mashhadi Heidar (2019), zone of proximal development which can be characterized as the zone of uncertainty and confusion, may be reduced by the students' ability to independently solve their problems.

1.1 Research Question

The question of the study is as follows:

Does collaborative output tasks-based instruction have any significant impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice?

1.2 Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis of the study is as follows:

Collaborative output tasks-based instruction does not have any significant impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice.

2. Review of the Literature

The theoretical framework of this study is based on collaborative output study done by Kowal and Swain (1994) regarding the sociocultural theory. As stated by Jabbarpoor and Tajeddin (2013), along with individual output,

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collaborative output has also been recently scrutinized carefully, mainly from the perspective of sociocultural theory. Collaborative output tasks, originating from the sociocultural theory, intend to aid the learners to improve their language acquisition through the negotiation of meaning and social interactions. Swain (2000), integrating her output hypothesis with sociocultural theory, claims that learners formulate their hypotheses about form and meaning and put those hypotheses to test while engaged in collaborative output tasks. While the learners interact with each other using the language collaboratively for problem solving purposes, they are in fact engaged in a cognitive activity.

Sociocultural theory, thus, offers insightful perspectives on the role of collaboration in learning. These perspectives have inspired many studies aimed at finding evidence regarding the facilitative effects of collaborative tasks in second language learning (Donato, 1994; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Leeser, 2004; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Reinders, 2009; Storch, 1998; Swain, 2000; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Swain and Lapkin (2001), for example, compared the effectiveness of two focus-on-form tasks, jigsaw and dictogloss. Both tasks involved the learners in collaborative reconstruction of written texts. They concluded that students in either tasks focused equally on form as they collaboratively constructed the texts. Additionally, the dictogloss led students to notice and reproduce complex syntactic structures. Kowal and Swain (1994) reported on a study aimed at collaborative output. The study was conducted on intermediate and advanced French learners working collaboratively to reconstruct a text. The researchers hypothesized that collaborative output would promote learning by making the learners aware of the gaps in their present knowledge, raising their awareness of the links among the form, function, and meaning, and helping them receive feedback from their peers during task completion.

With the rapid development of multimedia technology, some researchers also explored how to apply it to facilitate language teaching. For example, based on the Output Hypothesis, Shendan and LU Guojun (2019) took the UNIPUS college English autonomous learning platform as a carrier, and studied the influence of the output module of the platform on the English vocabulary acquisition of students in applied undergraduate colleges, which demonstrated the facilitative role of the output module of autonomous learning platform in promoting vocabulary learning.

2.1 Grammar Learning Strategies

In English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) context, numerous studies of the strategies used by learners have been carried out. Hardan (2013) and Habok and Magyar (2018) explain Oxford's (1990) taxonomic classification of the strategies including three direct and three indirect strategies. The direct strategies are specific means of language use learners deploy when working with the language itself, and they are memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. The cognitive strategies are the conscious mental strategies (for example using mnemonic devices to learn vocabulary or practice drills to learn a particular language structure) learners use to link new information with an existing schema by analyzing, reasoning, classifying, and drawing conclusion based on the existing knowledge. The memory strategies are for storing, remembering, and retrieving of information when needed and the compensation strategies help the learners to guess intelligently while using the language despite any deficiencies in knowledge. The indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies and they are used when the learners manage the learning context themselves. Whereas the metacognitive strategies are used by learners to co-ordinate the learning process by organizing, planning, and evaluating their learning, affective strategies are used to handle emotions and attitudes to lower anxiety, build self-confidence by encouraging oneself. The social strategies are the activities learners use to get opportunities to ask questions, co-operate and empathize with other learners, more experienced learners, and even native speakers of the language.

2.2 Instructional Approaches to Grammar Teaching

There have been different instructional approaches to grammar teaching. As Nassaji and Fotos (2011) point out, grammar pedagogy started with intensive focus on grammar. Consequently, early methods such as the grammar translation method (GTM) paid considerable attention to teaching second/foreign language (L2) structures. However, with the advent of communicative teaching approaches in the 1970s, grammar teaching became unfavorable. Even some L2 researchers (e.g., Krashen, 1993) argued that L2 grammar teaching was unnecessary. However, in recent years, many scholars (e.g., Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; Nassaji & Tian, 2010) assert that L2 instruction without focusing on grammar is inadequate. Along the same line, research (e.g., Nassaji, 2000; Samuda & Bygate, 2008) has emphasized the role of grammar within form-focused instruction in meaningful communicative contexts. Hence, focus on form (F on F) instruction, a recent development in grammar pedagogy, has received attention.

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'F on F' is "instructional option which integrates grammar and communication in L2 teaching" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011), that is, it is concerned with "how focal attentional resources are allocated to linguistic forms" (Long & Robinson, 1998). Inducing L2 learners to pay attention to linguistic forms can be implemented through different types of tasks including input- and output-based tasks. According to Nassaji and Fotos (2011), input-based options such as textual enhancement tasks focus on grammar mainly through what learners receive from input whereas output-based options, such as jigsaw tasks, basically focus on "grammar through engaging learners in activities in which they produce language collaboratively. Nonetheless, growing controversy exists over the effectiveness of input-based tasks vs. output-based ones, which aptly calls for more empirical evidence about their effectiveness with regard to L2 grammatical accuracy, given that various types of tasks may have differential effects on the development of L2 grammar learning. This issue finds theoretical justification when 'F on F' is assumed to be an approach which makes L2 learners pay attention to linguistic structures in communicative contexts (Long, 2000).

To move further, different types of tasks may have differential effects on language learners' general tendency to communicate effectively in L2. As MacIntyre and Charos (1996) state, performing various tasks can influence L2 learners' willingness to speak or remain silent. Thereby, another line of inquiry which is worth consideration is L2 learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), that is, readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, or persons, using [an] L2 (McIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). As Swain and Lapkin (2002) cogently state, language is learned effectively in interactive and meaningful contexts. It is, thus, very important to study the factors, such as the kind of tasks, which help L2 learners improve communication. In this light, it is logical to explore whether input-based and output-based tasks engender in L2 learners enough willingness to seek out communication opportunities, along with the grammar accuracy enhancement.

2.3 Collaborative Output Tasks

Collaborative output tasks refer to those activities that are designed to encourage learners to produce output collaboratively and reflect on and negotiate the accuracy of their language use. In such activities, the learners' attention is drawn to both meaning and forms (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Different types of collaborative output tasks are utilized in second language classrooms. These include dictogloss, in which learners are required to work together and collaboratively reconstruct a text presented to them orally (Kowal & Swain, 1994); cloze tasks, in which learners are asked to reconstruct a text and fill in the missing words collaboratively (Pica, 2005); and editing tasks, in which learners are required to correct a text in order to improve its accuracy (Storch, 2007).

Considering the various roles that output can have in SLA, we need to look at various collaborative output tasks (dictogloss and jigsaw tasks) that might help learners in acquiring the grammatical properties of a target language. Pushing learners to produce output through collaborative tasks might facilitate the accurate and appropriate use of language forms and structures. Dictogloss is a type of task-based collaborative output activity which aims at helping learners to use their grammar resources to reconstruct a text and become aware of their own shortcomings and needs. It consists of a listening phase and a reconstruction phase when learners are asked to reconstruct a text rather than write down the exact words that are dictated. As the text is read at a natural speed, students cannot write down every word but only key words, and they have to understand the meaning and use their knowledge of grammar in order to reconstruct it.

A number of studies have investigated the role of collaborative output tasks in L2 learning (e.g. Kowal & Swain, 1994; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 2005, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). One of the first studies investigating the role of collaborative output tasks on learning grammar was conducted by Kowal and Swain (1994). Dictogloss as a specific kind of collaborative output task was used with a focus on learning French grammar, particularly present tense. Based on the results, Kowal and Swain came to the conclusion that when learners were participating in dictogloss tasks, they found gaps in their linguistic resources, they noticed the link between form and meaning, and they were given opportunities to receive feedback from their peers.

2.4 Research on Collaborative and Individual Output Tasks

Numerous studies have investigated the roles of different types of output tasks under collaborative and individual conditions. The results have provided positive evidence for the effectiveness of collaborative tasks, with the task type acting as an important moderator variable. For example, Wajnryb (1990, cited in Nassaji & Tian, 2010) examined a particular pedagogical task called dictogloss. Their results showed that when learners were involved in the co-production of language through such tasks, they noticed gaps in their knowledge of language, their attention was

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drawn to the link between form and meaning, and they obtained feedback from their peers. Nabei (1996) conducted a similar study with four adult ESL learners who worked in pairs to complete a dictogloss, and obtained similar results. She found many instances where the activity promoted opportunities for attention to form, scaffolding, and corrective feedback.

The relative effects of different types of tasks have also been examined by many researchers. Swain and Lapkin (2001) compared the effectiveness of a dictogloss with a jigsaw task (in which pairs of students created a written story based on a series of pictures). Participants were enrolled in two grade 8 French immersion classes. Each class completed one of the tasks. The learners' interactions during the tasks were analyzed in terms of language related episodes (LREs), re-fined as episodes in which learners talked about, questioned, or self-corrected the language they produced. The results showed that both tasks generated a similar and substantial amount of language related episodes. There was no significant difference between the two types of tasks in terms of the overall degree of the learners' attention to form as reflected in their LREs. No significant difference was found between the two groups' posttest scores either, suggesting that the two types of task produced comparable degrees of language gains.

2.5 An Awareness of Raising Attempt on Passive Voice

Passive voice is commonly preferred in certain genres such as academic essays and news reports, despite the current trends promoting active voice, it is essential for learners to be fully aware of the meaning, use and form of passive voice in order to communicate more effectively. This study aims to explore ways to help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners notice and revise voice in English and raise their awareness of when and how to use active and passive voice to convey meaning in their written and spoken communication. The study focuses on a different approach to teach voice in English, which might help students become more aware of the use of passive voice. The issues related to the use of passive voice are derived from the work of EFL learners who failed to make sensible decisions about when and how to use passive voice partly because of the differences between their mother tongue and English and because they were not aware of the fact that active and passive voice would not alternate all the time.

Passive voice is one of the language elements English language learners especially in an EFL setting have difficulty with. This might stem from various reasons and some might be context and domain specific, yet it is obvious that this eventually affects their performance negatively in terms of language variety and accuracy as well as comprehension. As suggested in the relevant literature, there is a need to help students notice and understand why and when we need passive voice instead of putting emphasis on the form (to be + past participle structure) and ask them to apply this to any tense, which hinders the internalization of passive voice use, and leads to the perception that is a discrete item to be tested on exams.

3.6 Empirical Background to the Study

Despite the outcry of using passives in academic writing, it should be noted that a great number of studies disclose the actual desire and frequency of passive voice used in scholarly writing. If passive voice was unnecessary and loathed by scientific writing guidelines and scholarly writers as Pullum (2014) pointed out, the question then will be asked – should passive voice not appear as frequent as what the research has found, and should it completely disappear in any kind of writing? Given that there has been a controversy on the uses of the passive voice, more evidence is needed in order to draw an objective conclusion. Bazerman (1988) examined 23 articles from Physical Review published between 1893 and 1980 and found that at least 75 per cent of all main transitive verbs were in passive forms in the examined articles throughout the period. Moreover, Rodman (1994) investigated a corpus of 16 scientific articles containing 66,500 words and revealed that 66 per cent of transitive verbs were in the passive forms in a corpus of 2,215 transitive verbs, which was close to Bazerman's findings. Both studies indicated that passive constructions did not only occasionally appear but indeed were frequently used in scientific discourse.

Additionally, Harmon (1992) studied 50 most-cited scientific literature and the result showed that 53 percent of the main verbs were in the passive structures. However, Harmon's corpus of the main verbs contained linking verbs and intransitive verbs, which might have influenced the proportion of passive frequency in his study due to a bigger number of total main verb count in the denominator, thereby reducing the proportion of passive frequency within the tested texts. Ding (2002) also suspected the proportion to be higher and argued that if linking verbs and intransitive verbs had been removed from the study, the proportion of passive frequency would have increased, and the percentage would have been closer to the results in Bazerman's and Rodman's studies.

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Ding (2002) claimed that two social values in science – "falsifiability of science and cooperation among scientists" – determined the use of passives in scientific communication. He indicated that passive voice was a high-frequency characteristic of scientific writing. It was also a dominant stylistic characteristic in scientific writing. He further argued that objective matters in this world were the representation of science, thus scientific writing should be thing-centered rather than human-centered. Since it was thing-centered, the subject of a sentence should refer more to objective matters than to humans (researchers or authors), because subjects emphasized topics of the sentences. Therefore, in the case of scientific writing, passive voice met the grammatical requirement of thing-centered scientific work. It was also a scientific responsibility to concentrate on things being acted upon or experiments being done instead of focusing on researchers or authors who acted upon things or completed experiments. Without human (researcher) intervening between readers and the study, the reader felt more connected to the experimental process.

In Ding's article, he summarized three merits of passive voice as it was an integral part in scientific writing. First, he noted that using passives to concentrate on the physical world helped "de-emphasize discreteness of scientific experiments" (2002). Additionally, it removed "personal qualifications of observing experimental results" (2002, p. 137). Finally, by presenting objects of scientific work, passives improved collaboration among scientific researchers. To fulfill the two scientific social values, the passive voice played a role as objective practices of scientific studies rather than choices of personal preference among independent scientists. He pointed out that scientific theories may sometimes be invalid, thus scientific experiments needed to be even objective. Scientists could examine them critically so that a valid theory could be replaced, only when the theory was falsifiable and refutable. On the other hand, since valid scientific theories must be testable and repeatable with the same outcome, the primary attention should not be focusing on who conducted the experiment and who proposed the theory but focusing on the experimental procedures and the results. In addition, the second social value manifested in Ding's article indicated the integrality of scientific work, suggesting a close relevance and connection among theoretical foundations and experimental practices. Therefore, he saw a general trend in scientific communities, which embraced cooperation among scientists including scientific writing. To think in this way, the use of passive voice provided a common knowledge foundation among working scientists in all fields, which fostered collaboration (Ding, 2002).

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

This study follows a quasi-experimental design. Firstly, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to 100 learners at intermediate level who had been learning English as a foreign language at Tonekabon language institutes. Then 40 participants were randomly assigned to control group and experimental groups, and for each group a pretest of active/passive voice was administered. The experimental group received collaborative output tasks as treatment while the control group continued the existing method. At the end, both groups took the same posttests to evaluate the effect of the treatment.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study included 40 Iranian intermediate EFL learners who participated in the study from Tonekabon language institutes. For the purpose of their homogeneity, they were selected out of 100, based on an OPT which placed the learners as "Intermediate" on a criteria basis. Since there is a control of sex, the 40 participants included were only female learners. The 40 participants were then divided and were randomly assigned to the experimental (N=20) group as well as the control group (N=20).

3.3 Procedure

The OPT of the study administered to measure the degree of the participants' proficiency was a paper-and-pencil test. The pretest of the study was a paper and pencil test including 30 multiple-choice items with a time limitation of 45 minutes during which the participants were given the opportunity to fill the answer sheet. This was the same as the posttest of the study. The treatment of the study, for the experimental group, included 10 sessions of teaching the participants using the collaborative tasks to teach active/passive sentences and the control group receives the placebo. Each session took 90 minutes and no specific instruments like computers or other digital tools were used.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Materials for the OPT

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An OPT was used in this study just to determine the level of proficiency based on the cut-off scores of 1 standard deviations below to 1 standard deviation above the mean of the OPT to represent the intermediate level. The test consisted of 40 items including grammar (10 items), vocabulary (20 items), and reading comprehension (10 items).

3.4.2 Materials for the Pretest and Posttest of the Study

The pretest and posttest of the study contained a researcher-made test of active/passive voice sentences. The test included 30 multiple-choice items, all of which tested the participants' knowledge of English active and passive voice sentences. Using KR-21, the reliability of the test was calculated to be .82.

3.4.3 Materials for the Treatment of the Study

The materials for the treatment of the study contained 10 sentences (each session) (100 total) regarding active/passive voice. Then, they were taught to the experimental group of the study. The same sentences were taught to the control group but without any specific task. The sentences were adopted from: Martine Hewings, Advanced Grammar in Use. The test was in the form of "paper and pencil."

3.5 Data Analysis

The data on the pre-test and post-test were collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data of the current study were analyzed by applying an Independent-Samples T-test between the posttests of the study to show the difference between the groups mean scores, and the Paired-Sample T-test between the pretest and posttest of each group of the study to indicate the progress or no-progress from the pretest to the posttest.

4. Findings

4.1 The Descriptive Analysis of the Data

The descriptive analysis of the obtained data in the current study is concerned in this section. It was done by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The following table (1) shows the descriptive analysis of the data between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group of the study:

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the experimental group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest ex	17.9500	20	2.32775	0.52050
	Pretest ex	15.7500	20	2.73140	0.61076

As is indicated above (Table 1), the number of subjects participated in the study has been 20 in the experimental group. The mean for the pretest EX (pretest of the experimental group) was shown to be 15.7500 as compared to the mean for the posttest EX (posttest of the experimental group) which was 17.9500. The standard deviations obtained for the experimental group shows more variability among the scores of pretest EX rather than posttest EX scores. As a result of this fact, subjects' posttest scores in the experimental group may be more homogenous after going under the treatment. The proceeding table (2) shows the descriptive analysis of the data between the pretest and posttest of the control group of the study.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the control group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest con	15.2500	20	3.16020	0.70664
	Pretest con	14.8500	20	3.28113	0.73368

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As is indicated above (Table 2), the number of subjects participated in the study has been 20 in the control group. The mean for the Pretest CON (pretest of the control group) was shown to be 14.8500 as compared to the mean for the Posttest CON (posttest of the control group) which was 15.2500. The standard deviation of the pretest of the control group is 3.28113 and the standard deviation of the posttest is 3.16020.

4.2 The Inferential Analysis of the Data

This section elaborates the inferential analysis of the data which are obtained in the study. It was done using SPSS. The following tables summarize the inferential analysis of the data of the current study.

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test result of the study

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
Active/Passive Voice	Equal variances assumed	3.076	38	0.004
	Equal variances not assumed	3.076	34.928	0.004

As is pointed out in table (3), the t-value of the study was calculated between the posttests in the experimental groups and the control group. The observed t value was calculated as to be 3.076 which is higher than the critical t value (t= 2.021) and the degree of freedom was 34.928 (df= 34.928), and also the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.004 which has been used in rejection or support of the hypothesis of the study in the proceeding section. Paired sample T-test was run to determine students' progress within groups. It showed the participants' progress between pretest and posttest in the following table.

Table 4. Paired Samples T-test result for the experimental group

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Posttest ex – pretest ex	4.222	19	0.000

According to Table 4 which elaborates the results of paired samples t-test between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental group; the sig. value (0.000) is smaller than 0.05 which means the difference is significant. The observed t value is 4.222 (t= 4.222) that is higher than the critical t value (t= 2.093). Additionally, the degree of freedom was 19 (df= 19). This rejects the hypothesis. Based on the result of paired samples T-tests, the progress was statistically significant for experimental group. It means that the experimental group of the study made a distinct improvement in comparison to the control group.

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Table 5. Paired Samples T-test result for the control group

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 2	Posttest con – pretest con	0.984	19	0.033

As is shown in Table 5, the sig. value of the control group of the study was calculated to be 0.033 (sig. value= 0.033). The observed t value is 0.984 (t=0.984) that is lower than the critical t value (t=2.093). Additionally, the degree of freedom was 19 (df=19).

5. Discussion

This study was set out to investigate the impact of collaborative output tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice. The research question of the study was as follows: Do collaborative output tasks have any impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice? Then, on the basis of the research question, a null hypothesis was also proposed assuming that collaborative output tasks do not have any impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice.

As was mentioned earlier, based on the results of independent sample t test and paired sample t test, there was a significant difference in active/passive voice knowledge between the groups. Therefore, the differences may be attributed the presentation of collaborative output tasks to the participants. The obtained mean scores of each of the two groups on the active/passive voice posttests indicated that the experimental group obtained a higher mean than the control group, which turned out to be significant. Therefore, the findings of this study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between experimental group being taught by collaborative output tasks and control group being taught using the placebo. On the other hand, based on the findings of this study, the hypothesis of this study was rejected. The use of collaborative output tasks had a significant impact on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' active/passive voice knowledge.

The findings of this study were in line with those of Abassy Delvand and Mashhadi Heidar (2021), Jabbarpoor and Tajeddin (2013), Mashhadi Heidar and Afghari (2015), Abdollahi-Guilani and Tan (2016), Mansouri and Mashhadi Heidar (2019) and many other studies done in this area. Dehghan and Mohammad-Amiri (2017), quoting from Swain (1985) stressed the significant role of output in learning a second language, claiming that output is necessary and vital for learners to move from semantic to syntactic processing. Swain (2005) distinguished three functions of output in second language: 1) noticing function, 2) hypothesis testing function, and 3) metalinguistic function. The noticing function suggests that while producing output, learners may notice some gaps in their linguistic knowledge because they may find out that they are unable to say or produce what they want to say. The hypothesis testing function proposes that when learners are communicating with others, they attempt to say the same thing in different ways and in this way they may also come to recognize the comprehensibility and accuracy of their utterances. With meta-linguistic function, it is asserted that output pushes the learners to reflect consciously upon language and decide what to say and what not to say. Collaboration may expedite these functions as it involves the whole process of learning. It is through collaboration in which the learners are asked to work collaboratively to reach a common goal, that is, being responsible for one another learning as well as their own. Learners will be able to acquire a new knowledge whenever they go through communication problems and get the opportunity to talk about their solutions regarding such problems. Therefore, their existing knowledge can be consolidated through collaboration with their peers.

According to Rashtchi (2018), quoting from Vahedi-Langrudi, teaching the English passive voice is a challenging task mainly because of the lack conformity in the use of voice in Persian and English (Vahedi-Langrudi, 1996). Abdollahi-Guilani and Tan (2016) have pointed to some of the differences between passive voice in English and Persian. One difference, as they argued, is that the passive voice in English is mainly constructed by the various forms

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of the verb be and the past participial of the main verb while in Persian it is not only structured by the verb Shodan but also various morphological alterations.

The findings of this paper also support the claims proposed by some other studies conducted in the related domain. According to Jabbarpoor and Tajeddin (2013), in addition to individual output, collaborative output has recently received attention, predominantly from the perspective of sociocultural theory. Collaborative output tasks which are rooted in the sociocultural tradition aim to help learners promote their language acquisition through the negotiation of meaning and social interaction. Swain (2000) couched her output hypothesis within sociocultural theory. She argues that learners externalize their hypotheses about form and meaning and expose those hypotheses to scrutiny and discussion when they are engaged in collaborative output. When learners use language collaboratively for problem solving purposes, they are in fact engaged in a cognitive activity. Their metatalk through collaboration as well as their hypothesis testing about language and the feedback they receive from their interlocutors during collaboration results in language growth. While positive evidence in the input from the peers deepens or enhances learners' knowledge about the forms, negative peer feedback may draw their attention to the forms they may not have noticed acting alone. In this case, peers may facilitate the acquisition of the language forms by filling the gaps in their interlocutors' knowledge.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of collaborative output tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice. The results of this research support the idea that collaborative output tasks can be highly effective and help attract and sustain the learners' attention in the class, which is the main goal for making learning successful. The findings of this study suggest that the use of collaborative output tasks can present opportunities to help and encourage students to learn active/passive voice. EFL teachers can make their classes motivating and enjoyable. Teachers can save time and energy in classes through the use of collaborative output tasks. In general, therefore, it seems that EFL teachers need more training to develop collaborative output tasks in class. Sometimes, it is difficult to make EFL learners understand certain difficult and complicated topics. However, some topics are complicated, but teachers can surely help a lot in making the ideas simple and easy to grasp for learners. This is the best situation which all the language pedagogues advocate for meaningful teaching. As a result, it can be claimed that a good teacher is the one who uses collaborative output tasks, which helps students to learn better since they prevent them from staying passive during the lesson.

On the other hand, it is hoped that this study includes useful findings for other researchers and syllabus designers in order to enhance the effectiveness of English language active/passive voice knowledge. It is claimed that teachers have an incisive role in the learning process, but they cannot achieve their aims of language teaching without the help of other educationists. In this regard, language teaching aims should be important to other groups of educationists, such as syllabus and course designers, material and curriculum developers, and policy makers. Syllabus and course designers should focus on collaborative output tasks that help learners improve their active/passive voice knowledge and abilities to produce second language. Then, syllabus designers are expected to include the use of collaborative output tasks.

The study provided some valuable insights regarding the impact of collaborative output tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of active/passive voice; however, it suffered from some limitations. First, the contribution of other learners with a different age range could possibly result in different outcomes. Another limitation of this study was that all the participants were intermediate students in just one language institute. Thus, the generalizability of the findings of this study must be treated more cautiously as a small sample of participants was included in this study. The participants were all selected from intermediate level; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the learners in other proficiency levels. The study was limited to just active/passive voice knowledge, so the other skills and components of language remained untouched. Lastly, the sample size was another limitation in the present study which confined to two specific classes with small sample size, so great caution should be exercised in generalizing the results to other situations.

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